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Univ teachers, govt officers suspend agitation

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Govt initiates talks to address pay disparities

Staff Correspondent

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on January 11 for removal of disparities from the new pay structure continued for the ninth consecutive day on Tuesday, keeping academic activities at the public universities at a halt.

'We are temporarily suspending out work abstention,' Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers Associations secretary general ASM Maksud Kamal said coming out from a federation meeting held at Dhaka University.

He said that the federation took the decision honouring Prime Minister's assurance about meeting their demands and request to call off their work abstention.

The Prime minister on Monday at the sideline of Pitha Utsab sat with federation leaders and assured them that their demands would be 'taken into consideration'.

PM's press secretary Ihsanul Karim after the meeting said that the scope for elevating the university teachers to grade 1 from grade 3 would be created. The press secretary also said that the teachers' demands would be 'duly considered'.

Maksud Kamal said that the federation leaders would meet on February 3 to analyse the situation and if their demands were not met by this time they would declare fresh agitation programmes.

Professional groups of engineers, agriculturists and doctors and the BCS Coordination Committee, a plat-

form of 26 cadres, called off their agitation after a meeting with the government high-ups.

The aggrieved civil servants were protesting against the new pay structure that abolished the selection grade and the timescales.

'We have decided to call off the agitation programme to facilitate the ongoing discussions with the government high-ups,' the steering committee member of the four groups SM Golam Kibria said after a meeting of the aggrieved groups.

Leaders of the steering committee, led by agriculturist AFM Bahauddin Nasim, also a ruling Awami League lawmaker, held a meeting with the secretaries to the public administration ministry and the local government division on Tuesday.

Bahauddin later told reporters that the government had assured them of making necessary changes in the latest order that provided financial authority to upazila nirbahi officers.

The agitating government officers, many of them engineers, doctors and agriculturists have also been pushing for cancellation of the order that provided financial authority to upazila nirbahi officers, among other demands relating to the 8th pay structure.

The disbursement of all funds at the upazila level - second tier of the local government system - now require signatures of the

upazila chairman and the UNO as the field-level administration cadre officers were empowered further, aggrieved officers said quoting a circular of the Cabinet Division issued on October 14.

Meanwhile work abstention by about 15,000 teachers paralysed the 37 public universities across the country on Tuesday and no classes were held at the campuses for a straight nine days.

On Sunday, the teachers' federation sent a proposal to education secretary Sohrab Hossain to place 25 per cent of the professors in grade 1 and provide pay, perks and status of senior secretaries to five per cent of the senior professors.

Sohrab Hossain said that government was trying to resolve the crises facing the public universities by upholding the teachers' dignity.

The public university teachers under the banner of the federation have been vocal against the 8th National Pay Scale since May 2015. And their movement intensified after the government issued gazette notification of the new pay scale in the second week of December by abolishing selection grade and time scales.

Teachers in May 2014 put forward a charter of demands that includes the formation of an independent pay scale for public university teachers. The other demands of the public university teachers are salary and allowance

parity between senior professors and senior secretaries, and between professors and secretaries; upgrading the status of teachers in the warrant of precedence; and the provision of cars and other allowances for teachers, similar to provisions given to bureaucrats.

At least four meetings since last in September between education minister Nurul Islam Nahid and public university teachers failed to find any breakthrough in the crisis.

Teachers observed full-day work abstention on September 8, 13 and 17, respectively, besides taking part in processions and human chain on several occasions, and submitted memorandums to the education and finance ministers.

The aggrieved civil servants abstained from work for two hours every day for a week from January 11 across the country in protest at the 'discriminatory' pay structure.

During the weeklong programme, the professional groups and members of 26 Bangladesh Civil Service cadres wore black badges while attending offices.

The prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, earlier asked the principal secretary to the Prime Minister's Office, the finance secretary and the administration minister to look into the grievances of the public university teachers and other government servants for a redress.